

**Statement**  
**Senator Kerry**  
**Commerce Committee**  
**Hearing on Election Reform**  
**March 7, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, Senator Hollings, thank you for holding this hearing today. It has been approximately four months since Americans cast their vote for President, and for many, there remains a degree of uneasiness about the whole process. Many Americans who voted or tried to vote feel disenfranchised. They believe their votes didn't count and their voices weren't heard.

We can be thankful that we are past the days of poll taxes, literacy tests, and other discriminatory practices that kept voters away from the polls. But if there is even an inadvertent flaw in the design or administration of our voting systems that prevents Americans from having their votes counted, it is our utmost responsibility to ensure that we remedy the situation.

There is simply no excuse for the most technologically savvy nation in the world to be using voting equipment that is 30 years old. And it is disturbing, to say the least, that much of the oldest and least reliable equipment is found in the poorest counties across the country. Often, people of color make up the majority of the population in those counties. None of us should ever again be in the position of having to explain to urban, minority voters why a portion of their votes didn't get counted, while their white suburban neighbors, using better equipment, could rest assured that there were no voting irregularities in their precincts that would have caused their votes to be discarded.

If we can't promise all of our citizens that their votes will count equally, then all of the past work this nation has done to guarantee the right to vote to women, people of color and the poor will have been squandered.

That is why I am pleased you have gathered these witnesses for this hearing today. Perhaps the silver lining to the problems that came to light during the last election is that we in Congress are taking a serious look at ways to fix the system and ensure that all Americans who register to vote can vote, and that all Americans who do vote can be sure their vote counts.

The first order of business for the Federal government is to provide states with at least a portion of the resources they will need to overhaul their voting systems. State officials, from governors to county supervisors, face competing demands for funds every day, as they decide how to pay their teachers, pave their roads, and remove their garbage. When it comes to paying for Federal elections, buying the newest, most reliable technology may be far down on their list of priorities. That is why Federal government must find a way to provide at least a portion of the resources states will need to make improvements that are necessary to assure the integrity of our elections.

But legislation cannot simply stop with more money. Legislation must ensure that states will have guidelines in place that will ensure that voters who speak languages other than English can vote. It must ensure that people with disabilities can vote. It must ensure that people of color are not denied the right to vote.

We must never again read in the Washington Post statistics like this:

- “As many as one in three ballots in black sections of Jacksonville...did not count in the presidential contest. That was four times as many as in white precincts elsewhere in mostly Republican Duval County.”
- “In Miami-Dade County precincts where fewer than 30 percent of the voters are black, about 3 percent of the ballots did not register a vote for president. In precincts where more than 70 percent of the voters are African American, it was nearly 10 percent.”

- “In many black precincts in Chicago, one of every six ballots in the presidential election was thrown out, while almost every vote was counted in some of the city’s outer suburbs.”

It is our responsibility to respond to shocking statistics like these. It is our duty to act in a way that each and every one of our citizens is ensured of his or her right to vote. We simply cannot do anything less.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.